



Improving Early Literacy of Preschool Children

a handbook for
prekindergarten
educators

edited by
Chrys Dougherty

Texas Instruments Foundation

Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin

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Why this handbook was developed



This handbook arose from the Texas Instruments Foundation's experience in carrying out the dream of TI's late CEO, Jerry Junkins, to create effective early intervention programs for young children. TI Foundation leaders were aware of research findings on the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan, which had produced benefits up to seven times the cost of the program. Wishing to have a similar impact in Texas, in 1990 the Foundation began working with the Margaret Cone Head Start Center, which serves low-income children in an impoverished neighborhood in southeast Dallas.

The Foundation provided funding for supplemental health, nutrition, and social services; teacher salary increases; and a year-round extended-day program. An early evaluation of the program showed that the children were making gains in social skills. However, there was no evidence that they were catching up in language, thinking, and prereading skills.

In response to these results, in 1993 the Foundation contracted with Nell Carvell of the Learning Therapy Program at Southern Methodist University to develop a program to help the Cone Center children develop language and prereading skills. This program, the Language Enrichment Activities Program (LEAP), was put in place at the Cone Center beginning with the 1993-94 school year. This program began showing positive results the first year it was in effect.

After three successful years with the LEAP program, in December 1996 the TI Foundation approached the LBJ School to research how to encourage other preschool and child care programs serving low-income children to adopt similar improvements. Spreading these improvements widely around the state was beyond the Foundation's ability to do alone.

The LBJ School research project investigated ways to combine public and private money to have maximum impact on preschool children's later reading success. Out of the project came two products: a state funding proposal entitled *Texas Ready-to-Read Grants: An Extension of the Texas Reading Initiative*, and this handbook. The goal is to give early childhood educators the tools and the resources they need to enhance the quality of their preschool programs, just as TI was able to do at the Margaret Cone Head Start Center in Dallas.

Improving early literacy of preschool children

The groundwork for reading starts long before children begin formal instruction. Preschoolers with rich literacy experiences are much more likely to start school ready to learn to read. According to the 1998 Position Statement by the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, “failing to give children literacy experiences until they are school-age can severely limit the reading and writing levels they ultimately attain.”

Because many low-income children do not have rich literacy experiences during the critical preschool years, many fail to become good readers in elementary school. Exposing young children to early literacy should be part of a preschool program’s larger mission of meeting their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs.

The Texas Instruments Foundation commissioned this guide to help educators, preschool coordinators, and community leaders incorporate prereading skills into preschool programs serving low-income children. This guide is designed to answer the following questions:



What prereading skills can preschoolers learn?

Early literacy can be nurtured by focusing on activities that help children develop the following skills:

1. Oral language
2. General knowledge
3. Print awareness
4. Alphabet knowledge
5. Phonemic (sound) awareness
6. Prewriting

What strategies can improve a preschool program?

Some examples:

1. Set goals
2. Create an improvement plan
3. Build a classroom library
4. Train the teachers and encourage collaboration
5. Keep track of children’s progress
6. Inform and involve parents
7. Communicate with the elementary schools the children will attend
8. Measure and document results

Prereading skills for preschoolers



ORAL LANGUAGE AND LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Use rich language in the classroom.

Encourage children to speak using complex sentences and vocabulary.

Read aloud daily.

Ask children what they think characters are feeling and how they would change the ending.

Give children the opportunity to tell and act out stories.

Early literacy can be nurtured by encouraging activities and play that help develop the following six skills. These skills should be taught simultaneously, not one at a time. Children should have opportunities to work on them from the first day of preschool.

Oral language

Children acquire oral language by talking and listening to the adults around them. Oral language skills learned by three- to five-year-old children include the ability to use long and complex sentences, participate in extended conversations, and use and understand a wide vocabulary. Children's reading success depends upon their effective use and understanding of oral language. A child's command of oral language at age five is a major predictor of reading achievement at age seven.¹

Preschool teachers can encourage the development of these skills when they:

- **Use rich language in the classroom.** Preschool teachers should talk to young children without oversimplifying language or using "baby talk." Model the use of descriptive words such as *exceptional*, *fascinating*, *persistent*, and *confident* and feeling words such as *enthusiastic*, *excited*, *delighted*, *angry*, and *frightened* so that children become familiar with the use of rich vocabulary.

Hearing English spoken is especially important for children whose home language is not English. Bilingual teachers can be effective at facilitating students' oral language skills in both languages and in communicating with parents.

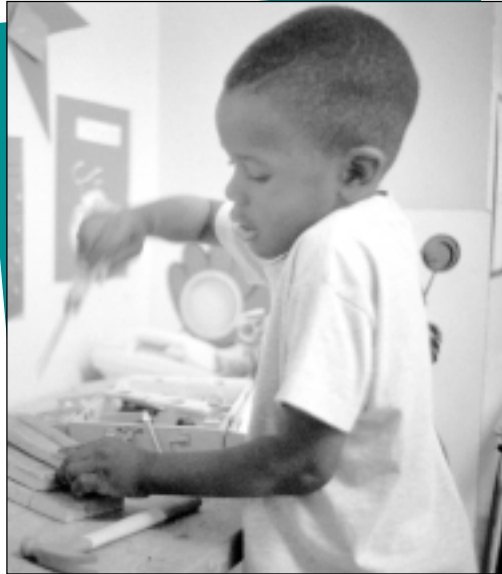
- **Encourage children to speak using complex sentences and vocabulary.** Children should be encouraged to talk about their experiences and stories they have heard. Young children should be encouraged to use their words to resolve misunderstandings and express how they are feeling (e.g., sad, angry, excited).

Teachers can model for children how to ask for what they want: "Could you please clean up the toys you left in the corner?" rather than, "Clean those toys up because I said so." If a child is having a dispute with another child, you might say, "Let's think about ways that you and Jose can share the toys in the sandbox."

- **Read aloud daily.** Read a variety of fiction and nonfiction books that contain rich vocabulary.

¹ G. Wells. "Preschool Literacy-Related Activities and Success in School," in *Literacy, Language and Learning: The Nature and Consequences of Reading and Writing*. D. Olson, N. Torrance, and A. Hildyard, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 229-255.

IMPROVING EARLY LITERACY OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN



GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

Read fiction and nonfiction books to the children daily.

Encourage children's questions.

Provide new and varied experiences in the classroom.

Provide outdoor exploration and field trips.

Teach thematic units on interesting topics.

Vary classroom centers weekly.

Encourage children to discuss a book before and after it is read. Children should also be encouraged to pretend to read from familiar books. Picture books encourage children to use their imagination to create their own stories.

- **Ask children what story characters are feeling and how they would change the ending.** By asking what characters are feeling, children can imagine what the character is experiencing. Asking children to change the story ending promotes the understanding that stories develop out of people's imagination and that children too can make up stories.
- **Give children the opportunity to tell and act out stories.** While they are in their classroom learning centers, children should be given the chance to dress-up, talk, dance, and act like the characters in the stories they have heard. A suitcase full of clothing in the dress-up center helps promote dramatic play. Children should be encouraged to tell people at home about the stories they have heard.

General knowledge

Young children learn about the world around them through experiences, conversation, exploration, and play. High-quality preschool programs can provide disadvantaged students with some of the opportunities that advantaged children have.

Lack of general knowledge makes reading more difficult in elementary school, particularly in the later grades when reading to learn replaces learning to read. A child who has listened to a book about glaciers will have an easier time understanding a story about climbing Mt. Everest.

Teachers can encourage their students' acquisition of general knowledge in several ways:

- **Read fiction and nonfiction books to the children daily.** A variety of books exposes children to information and ideas from outside their everyday experience.
- **Encourage children's questions.** Let children know you value what they say. Provide meaningful responses to their questions. Challenge them to think. For example, if a child asks, "What makes the sun shine?" you might want to answer with the following questions: "Do you think the sun's brightness has something to do with how hot the sun is? Do things glow when they get very hot? What about the little wire inside a light bulb? Could something going on inside the sun be making it very hot?"
- **Provide new and varied experiences in the classroom.** Encourage children to listen to different types of music, mix different colors of paint, grow plants from seeds, and play with magnets and magnifying glasses. Give them an opportunity to become curious about their surroundings.

- **Provide outdoor exploration and field trips.** Have children collect rocks, bugs, and leaves and describe what they have found. Take field trips to the airport, the fire station, and local nature areas.
- **Teach thematic units on interesting topics.** These topics might include the weather, transportation, dinosaurs, or spiders. Provide hands-on activities related to the topic.
- **Vary classroom centers weekly.** Create centers based on thematic units and change these centers often. Add new books to the reading nook, menus to the housekeeping center, audio tapes to the listening center, and new art materials to the art center.

Print awareness

Children should become familiar with a variety of print and understand that print communicates information. These activities encourage children's awareness of print:

- **Expose children to different types of printed materials.** Provide books, magazines, newspapers, and menus.
- **Demonstrate the use and purpose of print.** Teach children how to hold a book correctly and the appropriate way to turn the pages. Likewise, children should learn to identify the beginning and end of a book (first and last page) as well as the beginning, middle, and end of a page. Each time a new book is introduced, the author and illustrator should be named so children can understand the job of an author and an illustrator.
- **Label objects in the classroom.** Labeling objects around the room in large bold letters and posting materials such as an alphabet chart promote print awareness. Children who often see their names printed on attendance charts and bulletin boards will recognize them more easily.
- **Read "big books."** Reading big books helps children recognize letters and words they already know.
- **Point to the words and follow the print with your finger as you read aloud.** This way, children can begin to understand that the story is read from the words, not the pictures, and that short spaces separate words.

PRINT AWARENESS

Expose children to different types of printed materials.

Demonstrate the use and purpose of print.

Label objects in the classroom.

Read "big books."

Point to the words in books and follow the print with your finger as you read aloud.

Alphabet knowledge

Preschool children can begin to explore letters by playing with alphabet puzzles, magnetic upper- and lower-case letters, sandpaper letters, and alphabet lotto games.

- **Post an alphabet chart.** Place the letters at the children's eye level.

ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

Post an alphabet chart.

Sing the “alphabet song.”

Read alphabet books aloud.

Appeal to the children’s senses as they learn about the alphabet.

Help children recognize the sounds that letters make.



- **Sing the “alphabet song.”** Follow along the alphabet chart with your finger as you sing the names of the letters.
- **Read alphabet books aloud.** Reading alphabet books to children helps them learn the alphabet and the sounds each letter makes. The children can also help make a class alphabet book.
- **Appeal to the children’s senses as they learn about the alphabet.** Allow children to “feel” the differences in the shapes of letters by letting them play with plastic alphabet letters. Encourage children to “write” letters in the air with their fingers, as well as in sand trays and on table tops that have a thin layer of shaving cream. Bake cookies in the shape of letters and encourage children to use Play-Doh and clay to shape letters.
- **Help children recognize the sounds that letters make.** Teach the sounds as you introduce children to the letters. For example, say “mmm” as you point to the letter “M.” Some letter sounds must be said quickly: For example, the sound of “B” is not “buh”; it is necessary to leave off the “uh.” Teaching letters and their sounds in connection with words helps children develop another important prereading skill, phonemic (sound) awareness.

Phonemic (sound) awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate separate sounds (phonemes) in spoken language. For example, a prekindergarten child might be able to produce a word that rhymes with “cat.” A kindergartner might be able to identify the “fff” sound at the beginning of “fish,” or put /f/-ish together to make “fish.” A first grader might be able to hear and identify all three sounds in “fish,” /f/ /i/ /sh/, as well as say “meat” without /m/: “eat.” This ability to hear and manipulate sounds is closely related to early reading success.

Phonemic awareness is different from phonics: phonemic awareness is the ability to hear individual sounds in spoken words, while phonics is a system for teaching what printed letters make the sounds.

To help children become aware of sounds in words:

- **Read aloud books that play with word sounds, such as Dr. Seuss books.** These stories help children focus on the similarities and differences in the way words sound.
- **Read, sing, and recite nursery rhymes and rhyming songs.** Children who are familiar with nursery rhymes can build on them by adding new words and rhymes. When reciting nursery rhymes, children can clap, tap their feet, or jump each time they hear a word that sounds like another word. Incorporate puppets and finger plays into playful rhyming games.
- **Play listening games.** Record familiar sounds and ask the children to tell what they are. Say parts of

familiar stories or nursery rhymes out of order or incorrectly. Have the children listen to tell you what is wrong.

- **Play rhyming games.** Start by comparing two words that rhyme (e.g., “sat,” “mat”). When children understand the concept of rhyme, ask them to produce real or made-up words that rhyme with a target word (e.g., given “lake,” a child might produce “make” or “pake”). Ask children, “Do ‘bat’ and ‘sit’ rhyme?” and see if they can identify words that *do* rhyme with “bat.” Don’t be concerned with spelling because the children are matching sounds: “wait” and “late” are perfectly good rhyming words.
- **Play games that involve counting words and syllables.** Teach the children to recognize the *number of syllables* (parts) in their own names by clapping their names (e.g., Da-vid). Then progress to familiar objects: (e.g., ba-na-na, mon-key, di-no-saur). Next, teach children to distinguish between a whole sentence and a part of a sentence, using simple examples (e.g., “The dog ran away” vs. “The dog away”). For counting the *number of words in a sentence*, begin with very short sentences (“Jim sat down”) and move to harder ones (“The boy goes to school”). One activity for counting words in sentences is to have the children move a block for each word they hear.
- **Blend onset-rimes.** The “onset” is the first consonant sound or sounds in the word; the “rime” is the rest of the word. Examples: /b/-all, /f/-ight, /s/-t/-op. To teach children to blend onset-rimes, say the word in parts and ask the children to tell you the word. For example: “I have a puppet friend who talks funny. When he says /b/-all, I know that he is saying ‘ball.’” (The sound of the letter “b” must be said quickly so that it doesn’t sound like “buh.”) “Tell me what word my puppet friend is saying if he says ‘/f/-ox.’”

PHONEMIC (SOUND) AWARENESS

Read aloud books that play with word sounds, such as Dr. Seuss books.

Read, sing, and recite nursery rhymes and rhyming songs.

Play listening games.

Play rhyming games.

Play games that involve counting words and syllables.

Blend onset-rimes.

Prewriting

Prewriting begins with “pretend writing,” as children sketch lines and scribbles in an attempt to imitate adults’ writing behavior. As young children learn the alphabet and the sounds that letters make, some children will begin to use *phonetic spelling* by attempting to spell words based on the sounds of the letters. For example, they might phonetically write “teacher” as “techr.”

Preschool teachers can encourage the development of prewriting skills in several ways:

- **Set up activities that use the children’s small hand muscles.** Children should engage in activities that develop their fine motor skills: cutting small pieces of paper, using tweezers to pick up objects from a tray, tracing letters, and using lacing cards.
- **Encourage children to write.** Create a writing center with a variety of materials such as crayons, pencils, construction paper, butcher paper, and receipt pads. Teach children how to write their names. Encourage the children to keep a daily journal where they write and draw their reactions to

IMPROVING EARLY LITERACY OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

PREWRITING

Set up activities that use the children's small hand muscles.

Encourage children to write.

Have children keep a daily journal.

Read back what the children have "written."

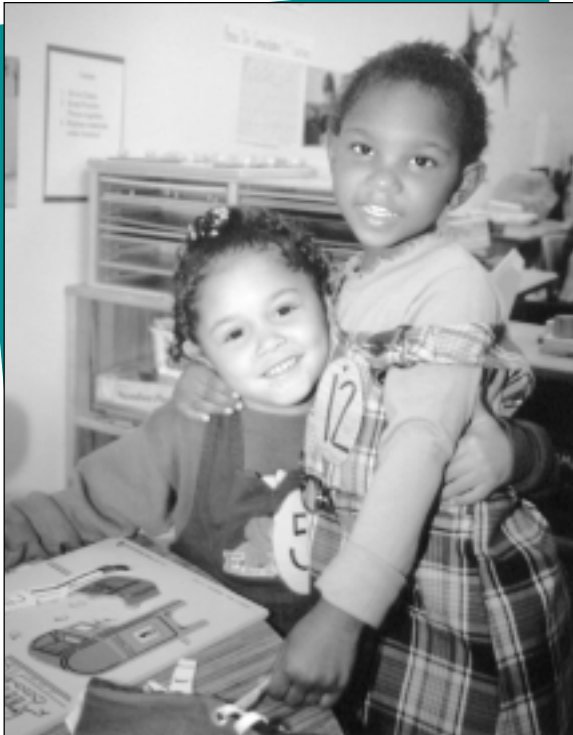
Write down the children's ideas and post them in the classroom.

stories. Encourage them to write or trace letters and to play pretend writing. For example, they can "write" out grocery lists, letters, and stories. Show children how to write and spell words whenever they show interest.

- **Have children keep a daily journal.** This can include pictures they draw about their day, with their "writing" about the pictures underneath. The teacher can act as a scribe and write out the children's sentences in the journal.
- **Read back what the children have "written."** Ask a child what his note or journal page is about and pretend to read it back. Encourage the children to "read" their writing to you.
- **Write down the children's ideas and post them in the classroom.** Ask the children to dictate their stories or impressions after a field trip for the teacher to write down. Write down the children's suggestions for where they would like to go on a field trip. Post lists of the children's favorite foods or toys.



Strategies for improving a preschool program



To improve a preschool program, begin by asking the following questions:

- What skills and habits do you want the children to develop?
- What have other effective preschool programs done to help children develop those habits and skills?
- What specific changes do you plan to make?
- How will you document the program's results?

Steps to improve a preschool program include:

Set goals

Goals may be divided into general goals—broadly stated descriptions of the skills, habits, and attitudes that children in the program should develop—and specific goals that describe observable, measurable evidence that these general goals are being accomplished. The table on page 18 contains examples of general and specific goals.

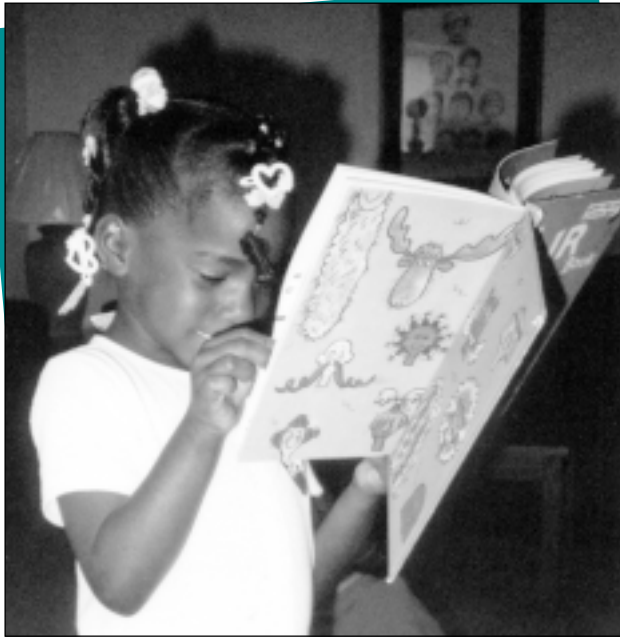
Specific goals should include the following information: WHEN, WHO, WHAT, and MEASURED HOW.

For example: By the end of preschool (*when*), three-quarters of the children who have been in the program for at least a year (*who*) will be able to identify all 26 alphabet letters and name their sounds (*what*), as measured by an interview assessment by the teacher (*measured how*).

Create an improvement plan

The plan should contain the following elements:

- **The program's general goals.**
- **The program's specific goals.**
- **Action steps required to reach the goals.** What centers will you create or change in the classroom? What training will the teachers receive? What other modifications are required in your program to make the goals attainable?



SAMPLE GOALS FOR A PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

General goals

The children should acquire phonemic awareness.

The children should develop a love of books and reading.

The children should learn how to resolve conflicts.

The program's graduates should enter kindergarten ready to learn and be successful.

Specific goals

At least two-thirds of children who have been in the program continuously for six months or more should be able to identify rhyming words. At least half should be able to blend the first sound of a one-syllable word with the rest of the word.

Each child who has been in the program for at least two months should show an interest in books and reading, as evidenced by one or more of the following:

- showing eagerness to participate in class read-aloud activities;
- asking to be read to by the teachers;
- asking to take books home; and/or
- spending at least 15 minutes in the class "reading nook" at least three times a week.

Each child who has been in the program for three weeks or longer should demonstrate the ability to resolve conflicts without fighting.

At least 95 percent of the program's graduates should be evaluated as "highly ready for kindergarten" in a survey of kindergarten teachers. At least 95 percent of the program's graduates should learn to read grade-level books independently by the end of first grade.

- **Resources required to reach the goals.** What time, money, and supplies are needed, and how will you come up with the necessary resources?
- **A plan to monitor implementation.** In three or six months, will you look back and see whether you actually did what you planned to do? What parts of the plan did you have to change to deal with unforeseen circumstances?
- **A plan to monitor results.** How will you tell whether the goals have been accomplished?

Build a classroom library

The ideal classroom library consists of at least 200 fiction and nonfiction books. Here's what you can do as you expand your supply of books:

- **Create a reading corner.** The classroom library can be located here. Organize the books into an attractive display. You can place a tape player and a variety of books on tape and allow children to listen as they follow along in the book. This can also be a place children can go as a reward for good work or behavior.
- **Include a wide variety of books.** The classroom library should include children's books on many subjects by a variety of authors. Check with your local school and public librarian to identify good authors and titles.
- **Establish a lending program so children may take books home.** This encourages parents who may not own many children's books to read to their children. A bilingual lending library may be particularly important for parents who do not speak English.
- **Hold book drives and fund-raisers to increase your book supply.** Hold a bake sale or seek donations from companies and the nonprofit sector.

CLASSROOM LIBRARY

Create a reading corner.

Include a wide variety of books.

Establish a lending program so children may take books home.

Hold book drives and fund-raisers to increase your book supply.

Train the teachers and encourage collaboration

Effective programs have teachers who are knowledgeable about child development and ways of working with young children. Here's how you can build a staff that is knowledgeable and works together:

- **Plan inservice training related to the program's goals.** Areas in which teachers may benefit from training include:

Classroom management in preschool programs
Teaching English to limited English-proficient children
Strategies for helping children develop phonemic awareness
Math and science activities for preschool children
Montessori and high/scope methods
Positive discipline for children with behavior problems
Questioning strategies when reading to children

Check at local universities to find out where this training may be available, and include a training budget in proposals submitted to funding sources.

- **Encourage teachers to continue their own education.** Teachers who are broadly educated have more knowledge to communicate to children.

TEACHER TRAINING AND COLLABORATION

Plan inservice training related to the program's goals.

Encourage teachers to continue their own education.

Allow time each week for teachers to meet and plan together.

Pair new teachers with veteran teachers.

Visit exemplary preschool centers and classrooms.

Encourage teachers to read.

- **Allow time each week for teachers to meet and plan together.** Consider giving preschool teachers a regular time during which they can work on lesson plans together.
- **Pair new teachers with veteran teachers.** Make sure that experienced teachers understand that the successful mentoring of new teachers is part of their job description.
- **Visit exemplary preschool centers and classrooms.** Find out about their goals and specific strategies and methods they use to work with children. Look for ideas that you could apply in your own program. Find out how they train their teachers.
- **Encourage teachers to read.** Teachers can be positive role models for children when they read recreationally and can talk about the interesting books that they have read recently. In addition, teachers should be encouraged to keep up with ideas and research in their field.

TEACHER TRAINING AT THE MARGARET CONE HEAD START CENTER

The Margaret Cone Head Start Center illustrates how training the teaching staff can improve children's learning. The Cone Center serves a predominantly low-income population in Southeast Dallas.

As part of the center's Language Enrichment Activities Program (LEAP), every teacher participates in a six-week language enrichment program at Southern Methodist University. For three hours a day, teachers receive instruction in sounding out words, reading comprehension strategies, writing, and grammatically correct speech. In addition, teachers at the Cone Center participate in several workshops a year that include instruction, practice, and feedback on their teaching.

The Cone Center also recruits volunteers from the Dallas community to teach a model lesson weekly at the Cone Center. Many of these volunteers are experienced teachers. After attending a training workshop similar to the regular teachers', the volunteers continue to give weekly feedback regarding the teachers' effectiveness and areas needing extra attention. Furthermore, the volunteers continue to serve as mentors for the teachers employed by the Cone Center.

The results of LEAP have been overwhelmingly positive. After teachers received training in a curriculum with a strong prereading focus, Cone Center children showed improved scores on a variety of assessments, improving their vocabulary, language skills, concept development, and social skills. They continued to show success after they entered kindergarten.

Keep track of children's progress

Monitoring children's progress helps teachers learn if specific teaching strategies are working. Documenting success is important if you plan to seek outside funding for your program.

You can keep track of children's progress in several ways:

- **Identify the goals you want to assess.** This could include specific prereading skills such as language and alphabet knowledge and the development of appropriate social skills.
- **Keep a log of daily or weekly observations on each child.** Journals and checklists where teachers write down their recollections daily or weekly are good ways to monitor children's growth over time.
- **Use checklists and work samples to monitor children's progress.** A portfolio that includes samples of a student's work from the beginning, middle, and end of the year can be useful to monitor growth.
- **Use appropriate tests and surveys to document whether the goals have been reached.** Tests can be used to assess the children in the beginning, middle, and end of the year. For example, standardized oral interview tests can be used to test the children's growth in oral language skills and level of phonemic awareness by the end of preschool. A survey of kindergarten teachers might provide information on how well the children are adjusting to kindergarten. A standardized oral or written reading test can be used to assess how well children are reading by the end of first grade.

Inform and involve parents

Encourage parents to *talk*, *listen*, and *read* to their preschool children. Tell parents about the importance of reading aloud to their children daily.

You can inform and involve parents in their preschoolers' education in a number of ways:

- **Inform parents about what their children should learn in preschool.** Share your weekly, monthly, and yearly classroom goals. Inform parents about the specific skills and habits you expect the children to develop.
- **Keep parents informed about their children's progress.** Let parents know about areas in which their children are making good progress and areas in which they need additional help. Send home samples of the children's work and notes about specific interests their children have developed in the classroom.

KEEP TRACK OF CHILDREN'S PROGRESS

Identify the goals you want to assess.

Keep a log of daily or weekly observations on each child.

Use checklists and work samples to monitor children's progress.

Use appropriate tests and surveys to document whether the goals have been reached.



PARENT INFORMATION AND INVOLVEMENT

Inform parents about what their children should learn in preschool.

Keep parents informed about their children's progress.

Give parents specific ideas about how they can help out at home.

Use home visits, teacher conferences, and parent training classes to keep parents informed.

- **Give parents specific ideas about how they can help out at home.** Encourage parents to read to their children fifteen minutes a day. Let parents know about the "skill of the week" and how they can help reinforce it at home. Send home activities, books, cassettes, and educational videos that the children can share with parents and siblings.
- **Use home visits, teacher conferences, and parent training classes to keep parents informed.** Contact with parents can be made through phone calls, notes, conferences, and newsletters. Home visits can help the teacher gain a better understanding of the child's home life and alleviate young children's fears about starting school.

To encourage parents to come to training sessions, offer a free book to the child of each parent who attends. Schedule training sessions and teacher conferences to accommodate the needs of working parents.

INFORMING AND INVOLVING PARENTS AT THE YSLETA PRE-KINDERGARTEN CENTER

The Ysleta Pre-Kindergarten Center has a Parent Academy that offers classes on topics such as Exploring Computers Together, Family Math, Parenting Seminars, and Cooking Our Way to Learning. At the beginning of the school year, a book credit is offered to all families. These are used as incentives to attend the classes. For every four classes attended, the parent earns one free book. Child care is also provided to parents who attend classes.

Communicate with the elementary schools the children will attend

When elementary schools take on an entering class of former preschoolers, they should have accurate information about the incoming children in order to adjust the curriculum to meet their needs.

To ensure a good transition from preschool to kindergarten:

- **Identify the elementary schools that the majority of the preschool children are likely to attend.**
- **Conduct field trips to those schools.** Allow preschool children to meet future teachers and observe kindergartners at work.
- **Meet with kindergarten teachers from those schools and discuss mutual expectations.** Discuss what the children are expected to learn in preschool and kindergarten, and ways to coordinate the preschool and kindergarten curriculum.
- **Pass on information about what the children have learned in preschool.** As the

preschool's graduates enter kindergarten, pass on checklists, observation logs, and work samples to inform the kindergarten teachers about the skills possessed by their incoming students. Share information about the curriculum at your preschool.

HOW THE MARGARET CONE HEAD START CENTER COLLABORATES WITH FRAZIER ELEMENTARY

Most of the children at the Margaret Cone Head Start Center in Dallas enter kindergarten at Frazier Elementary. The Cone Center teachers and director meet quarterly with the Frazier principal and kindergarten teachers to share information. Each spring, the Cone Center provides Frazier with a list of incoming kindergartners, along with an informal assessment of each student's general levels of development. Likewise, Cone Center teachers take their students on a tour of Frazier. The children get to meet the kindergarten teachers, visit the classrooms, and have lunch with the kindergarten children.

Measure and document results

To determine if a preschool program is making a difference, refer to the program's goals and your plan to reach them. To document the results of the program:

- **Keep track of children's progress in the program.** Use skills checklists, logs of informal teacher observations, and appropriate tests.
- **Keep track of children's progress after they leave the program.** Work with the school district that most of the program's graduates attend. Survey kindergarten teachers to find out how well prepared your program's graduates are. Work with the school district to keep track of the children's prereading and reading progress in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade.
- **Compare their later school success with that of nonparticipants.** Compare the children who participated in the program with a group of children from similar backgrounds who did not participate. The program and comparison group children should be given the same formal and informal assessments in kindergarten and first grade so that you can compare the two groups' success in their early years in school.
- **See if the program's goals were met.** Even if it's difficult to collect data on a suitable comparison group, you can still find out if the graduates of your program met the goals that you set out for them. If children from the program succeed at much higher rates than children of similar backgrounds have succeeded in the past, this is an indication that the program is successful.

COMMUNICATION WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Identify the elementary schools the majority of preschool children are likely to attend.

Conduct field trips to those schools.

Meet with kindergarten teachers and discuss mutual expectations.

Pass on information about what the children have learned in preschool.

DOCUMENTING RESULTS

Keep track of children's progress in the program.

Keep track of children's progress after they leave the program.

Compare their later school success with that of nonparticipants.

See if the program's goals were met.

